

IN THE CLAIMS

Claims 1-36. (Cancelled).

Claim 37. (Currently Amended) A method for determining seroconversion in a ~~subject~~ human infected with hepatitis C virus, comprising: (i) incubating a sample taken from said ~~subject~~-human, said incubating being carried out under reducing conditions with at least one polypeptide, the amino acid sequence of which is found in hepatitis C virus protein NS3 region, to determine binding of a hepatitis C virus specific antibody to said at least one polypeptide, and (ii) comparing results from (i) to results obtained at a previous point in time from said ~~subject~~ human which were negative for presence of HCV antibody, wherein a difference in (i) as compared to results obtained from said ~~patient~~ human at previous point in time which were negative is indicative of seroconversion.

Claim 38. (Previously presented) A method for determining seroconversion in a human subject infected with hepatitis C virus, comprising: (i) incubating a sample taken from said subject, with a first solid phase bound polypeptide, and a second, labeled polypeptide which is in solution, wherein the amino acid sequence of said first and second polypeptides are found in hepatitis C virus protein NS3 region, said incubation being carried out under reducing conditions, to determine binding of a hepatitis C virus specific antibody to both of said first and second polypeptides, and (ii) comparing results from (i) to results obtained at a previous point in time from said subject which were negative for presence of antibodies to hepatitis C virus protein.

Claim 39. (Previously presented) A method for determining hepatitis C virus specific seroconversion antibodies, comprising incubating a human sample suspected to be a seroconversion sample containing hepatitis C virus specific antibodies taken from a subject under reducing conditions which prevent formation of covalent, cross linked molecular aggregates with at least one polypeptide consisting of an amino acid sequence found in hepatitis C virus protein NS3 region, which is immunologically reactive with said hepatitis C virus specific seroconversion

antibodies, and determining binding of said antibodies to said polypeptide to recognize seroconversion in said subject.

- Claim 40. (Currently amended) ~~The method of claim 39~~ A method for determining hepatitis C virus specific seroconversion antibodies, comprising incubating a human sample suspected to be a seroconversion sample containing hepatitis C virus specific antibodies taken from a subject under reducing conditions which prevent formation of covalent, cross linked molecular aggregates with at least one polypeptide consisting of an amino acid sequence found in hepatitis C virus protein NS3 region, which is immunologically reactive with said hepatitis C virus specific seroconversion antibodies, and determining binding of said antibodies to said polypeptide to recognize seroconversion in said subject, wherein said polypeptide has been modified at at least one cysteine residue.
- Claim 41. (Previously presented) The method of claim 40, wherein said cysteine residue has been modified by covalent attachment of a modifying group.
- Claim 42. (Previously presented) The method of claim 40, wherein said cysteine residue has been replaced by another amino acid.
- Claim 43. (Currently amended) ~~The method of claim 39~~ A method for determining hepatitis C virus specific seroconversion antibodies, comprising incubating a human sample suspected to be a seroconversion sample containing hepatitis C virus specific antibodies taken from a subject under reducing conditions which prevent formation of covalent, cross linked molecular aggregates with at least one polypeptide consisting of an amino acid sequence found in hepatitis C virus protein NS3 region, which is immunologically reactive with said hepatitis C virus specific seroconversion antibodies, and determining binding of said antibodies to said polypeptide to recognize seroconversion in said subject, wherein said polypeptide consists of (a) at least amino acids 21-282 of SEQ ID NO: 9 and (b) a contiguous sequence of less than 20 amino acids that is not found in hepatitis C virus proteins, wherein (b) has been concatenated to the N or C terminus of (a), or an isolated polypeptide which is at least 90% homologous thereto, wherein at

least one cysteine of said polypeptide is modified either by replacing it with another artificial or natural amino acid, or by a modifying group.

- Claim 44. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 41, wherein said modifying group is maleimidodioctylamine, N-methyl-maleinimide, iodoacetic acid, and iodoacetamide.
- Claim 45. (Previously presented) The method of claim 42, wherein said cysteine residue has been replaced by serine, or γ -aminobutyric acid.
- Claim 46. (Currently amended) The method of claim ~~39~~43, wherein said polypeptide consists of at least amino acids 19 to 290 of SEQ ID NO: 9, and no more than amino acids 9 to 300 of SEQ ID NO: 9.
- Claim 47. (Currently amended) The method of claim ~~39~~43, wherein said polypeptide consists of at least amino acids 16 to 293 of SEQ ID NO: 9, and no more than amino acids 12 to 297 of SEQ ID NO: 9.
- Claim 48. (Previously presented) The method of claim 41, wherein said polypeptide consists of amino acids 14 to 295 of SEQ ID NO: 2.
- Claim 49. (Previously presented) A method for recognition of hepatitis C virus seroconversion, comprising: incubating a human sample suspected to be a seroconversion sample containing hepatitis C virus specific seroconversion antibodies taken from a subject, under reducing conditions which prevent formation of covalent, cross linked molecular aggregates with at least one polypeptide consisting of an amino acid sequence found in hepatitis C virus protein NS3 region, which is immunologically reactive with said hepatitis C virus specific seroconversion antibodies, and determining binding of said antibodies to said polypeptide to recognize seroconversion in said subject.